The Unified Theory of Epistemological Solipsism

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Section I.

Introduction

The cold vacuum of the cosmos surrounds me. Suspended in darkness, I, the sole star in this universe, shine steadily with a blinding degree of light. Far in the distance, something else is observed. They are not stars like myself, but rather a few planets, sprinkled across an otherwise blank canvas. Illuminated only by the light I emit, these planets are only visible because they reflect *my* light back at me. The question is, if my light is the necessary condition for these planets to be seen, how could I know if the planets exist independently of my light, or if they are nothing more than the reflections I am generating?

I can re-contextualize this scenario as my consciousness being the star. If my conscious perception and observation are the necessary conditions to experience the world around me, how could I know if any of it existed independently of my own conscious experience? In a similar fashion to my previous metaphor of planets reflecting a sole star's light, I could say that the world you experience is a reflection of your own consciousness. This concept is known as epistemological solipsism.

Epistemological solipsism is the idea that nothing can be proven to exist independently of your own consciousness. A core tenet of this idea is that everything you experience, from the touch of an object to the sun's heat against your skin, is received through sensory perception (hearing, sight, touch, taste, smell, etc.) These sensations are information processed and interpreted by your conscious mind to form a construct of reality. This reality, however, is one of subjective nature; it is merely a product of your mind, and therefore cannot be proven to exist independently of the mind that constructed it.

If the external world can't be trusted, what can? To answer this question, we will look at René Descartes' proposition "Cogito, ergo sum" which translates to "I think, therefore I am." This proposition from Descartes was a product of his evil demon

theory, which presented a reality in which an evil demon whose sole purpose was to deceive you could control your mind and in turn everything about the world you perceived. This demon could manufacture things like people, objects, experiences, memories, and even thoughts. If this demon was able to control your mind and the things you experienced, how could you be certain of any form of reality? Descartes' solution to this theory was "I think, therefore I am." In this proposition, he asserts that even if all else is in doubt, the simple act of doubting or thinking at all proves the undeniable existence of the thinking self. The demon may deceive me regarding *what* I perceive, but it cannot deceive me that *I* am the one perceiving and doubting.

Adding to Descartes' idea that the certain knowledge of the self is the one undeniable truth, I believe a self-aware consciousness experiencing itself either exists objectively or doesn't, even if its particular character and narrative details are subjective. While our specific depiction of the self may be nothing more than an artifact of our way of conceptualizing reality through subjective processes, the foundation of even the most minimal objectivity of consciousness occurring from some point external to any subjective construct cannot be denied. In this case, there is a necessary separation between the self as a subjective construction and the consciousness as an objective, fundamental process with definite source and location. In summary, your consciousness, in some capacity, must exist in some form of objective reality external to any construct of the mind.

A common challenge to epistemological solipsism is the problem of other minds. The problem of other minds asks how I could know that other minds aside from my own don't truly exist. It argues that if I can experience my own mental states, and I observe another person exhibiting the behaviors associated with those same mental states, I could infer that person is experiencing mental states similar to mine, and therefore possesses their own consciousness. For example, if I am experiencing a state of pain, joy, or thought, I may exhibit the behavior of wincing,

smiling, or speaking; so if another person exhibits those same behaviors, the problem of other minds infers that person possesses their own mental state and in turn their own consciousness. I believe the problem of other minds is an incredibly weak challenge to epistemological solipsism, as it relies heavily on inductive reasoning, assuming a truth rather than proving it. The inductive nature of the problem is its fatal flaw, as epistemological solipsism relies on your inability to prove anything's objective existence apart from your own consciousness, and the problem of other minds openly assumes rather than proves. Since you cannot experience any consciousness apart from your own, other "minds" lack the objective, foundational process I have previously defined necessary for true external existence.

Consistent with my earlier metaphor of the planets and the sole star, other minds you may infer to exist could easily be nothing more than a complex reflection of your own conscious processes. We could also return to René Descartes' evil demon theory to refute the problem of other minds. Descartes' evil demon theory would support the assertion that the design of the complex behavior observed in others is part of the deception; nothing more than a sophisticated lie and fabrication. It would also support the claim that no other external minds or consciousness would be required to generate the output you are perceiving.

Furthermore, the problem of other minds also focuses on the nature of communication. It claims that communication requires a genuine exchange of ideas, intentions, and understanding. I could, however, turn to your own dreams to discredit the problem of other minds in this aspect. It is a well-agreed upon concept that the people you interact with in your dreams do not exist external to your own mind, and yet they easily exhibit all the traits of a thinking, conscious mind. If the unconscious mind can produce a simulation of other minds that have no place in true, external reality, why would it be unreasonable to think that the conscious mind could do the same?

In summary, the problem of other minds is highly assumptive, inferring other minds exist independently rather than proving it. Because any counter to epistemological solipsism would require an objective proof, the problem of other minds becomes an invalid argument against its core tenets. Many of the ideas I have presented thus far easily dismantle the problem of other minds and its threat to the core concept of epistemological solipsism.

Epistemological solipsism is the concept that nothing can be proven to exist independently of your own consciousness. Much like a sole star in a universe, only able to view the planets surrounding it due to the reflections of its own light, how could you know that the world surrounding you is anything more than a reflection of your mind's interpretation of it? Almost as if the world around you was a blank canvas, perhaps your consciousness projects itself upon that canvas to create a subjective construct of experience. I discussed sensory perception (hearing, sight, touch, taste, and smell) and how those perceptions are interpreted to create a subjective construct of reality. I then discussed René Descartes' proposition "Cogito, ergo sum" as well as his evil demon theory. These ideas showed the unreliability of the subjective sensations of sensory perceptions and experiences in general, as well as establishing that even if nothing else can be trusted, the immediate concept of the thinking self is a certain truth. I then furthered Descartes' ideas by separating the self as a subjective construction and the consciousness as an objective, fundamental process with definite source and location. I then posited that your consciousness, in some capacity, must exist in some form of objective reality external to any construct of the mind. I then addressed the problem of other minds, concluding that it is an invalid argument against epistemological solipsism, and that many of my previous ideas easily dismantled the argument. That leaves us with the realization that a self-aware consciousness experiencing itself must have a definite existence in an external, objective reality, even if its particular character and narrative elements are merely a subjective construct. The most minimal

objectivity of consciousness existing external to any subjective construct is a fundamental foundation of an external, objective reality.

“If I experience within a framework of the mind's creation, how could I expect that creation to exist in any manner beyond its framework's limits?” — Damian Flowers

Section II.

Allegory of the Cave

Imagine a small group of prisoners, shackled to a wall since birth. This wall is located in a deep, subterranean cave, receiving no light from the outside world. Behind the wall, out of view to the prisoners, a fire remained lit at all times, illuminating the blank stone wall in front of them. Held above the back of the wall were a few stone statues, one of a bird, one of a man, and one of the sun. Each of the statues cast its own unique shadow on the wall before the prisoners to observe. The prisoners, having lived their whole lives in this cave, with no exposure to anything external to these shadows, believed the figures to be all that existed. To them, the shadows were true forms of reality, and thus they assigned names and characteristic elements to each of them. One day, a particular prisoner's chains broke free, allowing him to finally escape his confinement. He finds a path that leads him out of the cave, allowing him to experience the outside world for the first time in his life. When he first stepped outside the cave, he was immediately blinded by the intense light. After allowing his eyes time to adjust, however, he was free to experience the real world, as it truly was. He saw all the beautiful features of the world, no longer limited to the few shadowy figures he had spent his whole life knowing.

This story is Plato's Allegory of the Cave. It was intended as a metaphor that supported his theory of forms. Plato's theory of forms proposed two fundamental aspects of reality; phenomenon and forms. Plato believed that all of the aspects of the world you experience (trees, rivers, the sun) are made up of phenomenon, representations or depictions of that object's true form, subject to change at any moment. Forms, he suggested, are the object's true identity in objective reality, external to any phenomenon it displayed to you. In his Allegory of the Cave, the prisoners believed the phenomenon of the shadows projected on the wall as their

true forms, misplacing their trust in the framework they lived within. Eventually, after escaping his confinement, one prisoner realized that the figures portrayed on the wall in the cave were nothing more than phenomenon, and that the real entities of true form were found outside of the cave.

I believe that Plato's Allegory of the Cave can be used as a strong metaphor for a separate idea entirely; epistemological solipsism. In my version of the Allegory of the Cave, the cave is your mind. Your mind constructs and projects phenomenon in the same way that the cave projects shadows on its walls. Your mind then presents those phenomenon as an authentic truth to you in the same way that the cave presents the shadows as authentic to its prisoners. Beyond the confines of the cave, or the subjective mind, lies a place that holds true forms of objective reality, which is where I place your foundational consciousness. In essence, if you weren't limited to experiencing the subjective phenomenon constructed by your mind, but instead you could experience an objective, external reality independent of any construct of your mind, you would be left with the singular, foundational necessity that is your consciousness. While Plato saw the outside world containing the true forms of all things, in the framework of epistemological solipsism, the only true form that the escaped prisoner can undeniably witness outside the subjective cave is the objective, fundamental process of the consciousness.

Although Plato believed that all objects and entities posses forms that are objective, external truths of reality, the unprovable aspect of that idea makes his Allegory of the Cave best suited to describe the relationship between the subjective nature of mental constructions projected as experiences and the objective foundation of the process of consciousness itself.

“The world you experience is only as real as the tools it's mediated through. If all you've ever known is shadows, you will never experience anything aside from shadows.” — *Damian Flowers*

Section III.

The Quantum Aspect

Apart from a purely philosophical standpoint, epistemological solipsism is also supported by the metaphysical implications of the scientific concept of quantum physics.

To explain quantum physics' connection to epistemological solipsism, I will first turn to quantum superposition. Quantum superposition is the principle that a quantum system (such as an electron or photon) exists in all of its theoretically possible states simultaneously. For example, if the quantum system was a two sided coin, it would be both heads and tails at the same time. That is importantly, however, only until that quantum system is observed. Up until that point, the quantum system is in a genuinely undecided state, existing in all possible states at once. The superposed state of that system is described as a wave function, which provides the probabilities of finding the particle in any given state rather than a definite location. When observed, the particle "chooses" a singular, definite state from among its many possible states, breaking its previously superposed state. This is known as a wave function collapse, when the undetermined "wave" of possible states of a quantum system in superposition collapses into a single, definite state upon observation. The principle of quantum superposition strengthens my assertion that the reality you experience is a subjective construct of the mind, as it directly shows from a scientific perspective that the simple act of observing a particle forces it to assume a definite location. This is a direct proof that the mind can cause change to the world around you.

A well-known experiment that demonstrates the principles of quantum superposition is the double-slit experiment. In the double-slit experiment, particles such as protons or electrons are sent through two slits and stopped by a screen past them. The particles would be expected to form two strips on the screen, due

to being sent through two slits. The pattern actually formed, however, is an alternating pattern of light and dark strips. This pattern is characteristic of the interference pattern of waves. This result would make sense if the particles were defined by a wave function, meaning that they are in a superposed state. When the same experiment is subjected to observation, the wave-like pattern no longer results. When observed, the particles behave exactly as expected, and form two strips on the screen past the two slits. This is consistent with the principle of quantum superposition, once again demonstrating that a superposed particle will collapse into a definite state upon observation. This again strengthens the metaphysical implications of quantum physics, providing further proof of the conscious mind's effect on the subjective experience of reality.

Another experiment demonstrating the principles of quantum physics is Schrödinger's cat. Schrödinger's cat is an experiment where a cat is placed in a box with a radioactive substance, a Geiger counter, a hammer, and a vial of poison. If the Geiger counter detects a single radioactive atom decaying, it triggers the hammer to break open the vial of poison, killing the cat; if no atoms decay, the cat remains alive. According to quantum physics, the radioactive atoms of the substance remain in superposition of both decayed and undecayed states until observed. Due to the deciding factor of whether or not the cat dies being the state of the radioactive atoms, the cat is also in superposition, both dead and alive at the same time until observed. It is only when the box is opened that the state of the cat can be observed, causing a wave function collapse and forcing the cat to be either dead or alive. The Schrödinger's cat experiment helps expand the scope of quantum physics' metaphysical effects by showing that superposition is not limited to single particles. If a particle can exist in superposition, so can a cell, and if a cell can exist in superposition, so can an organism.

The core mechanic underlying all concepts discussed in this section so far is known as the measurement problem. The measurement problem is the

contradiction between quantum systems when they are observed versus when they are not. The measurement problem is the primary connection between quantum physics and epistemological solipsism. It directly displays the mind's impact on experienced reality, impacting the physical location of particles simply through observation. All of the concepts discussed in this section further support my assertion that experienced reality is a construct of the mind, projecting its subjective characteristic and narrative elements to create it.

Not only do the principles of quantum physics support metaphysical ideas, but so too did the scientist who laid the framework for quantum physics himself. Max Planck is considered the founder of the modern idea of quantum physics, producing compelling work that led to its development. Max Planck viewed consciousness as a fundamental part of reality, believing that all elements of reality originate from the conscious mind. This view sounds very familiar to epistemological solipsism.

Discussed in this section includes quantum superposition, where I established that the state of particles isn't definite until observed, the double-slit experiment, which confirms the theory of quantum superposition, Schrödinger's cat, which shows superposition can take place on a larger scale and isn't limited to particles, the measurement problem being the core point of interest to connect quantum physics and epistemological solipsism, and Max Planck's view on consciousness. The concepts discussed in this section support all of my previous assertions for epistemological solipsism in a scientific way, providing a solid proof for my ideas and pushing epistemological solipsism beyond theory. It showcases the overall theme that your experience of reality is dictated by subjective constructs of the mind.

“Wave functions collapse solely upon my observation; I am not merely an observer, I am the architect.” — *Damian Flowers*

Section IV.

The Unified Theory of Epistemological Solipsism

This paper describes, explains, supports, and strengthens the concept of epistemological solipsism. I have acquainted historical philosophical ideas with modern principles as a means of proof to support my improved theory. I name my improved theory of reality "The Unified Theory of Epistemological Solipsism." The core tenets my theory is comprised of are contained within this section.

I. The only entity that exists in independent, objective reality is the **Foundational Consciousness**. The **Foundational Consciousness** is the most minimal objectivity of consciousness occurring from some point external to any subjective construct.

II. Reality is separated into two entities; the **Self** and the **Consciousness**. The **Self** is a subjective construction of the mind, encompassing all of the characteristic and narrative elements of subjective reality, both of your concept of self and of the world around you. The **Consciousness** is the one objective truth, possessing definite source and location in objective reality in some capacity in a foundational and fundamental way.

III. The subjective world you experience is a projection of the characteristic and narrative elements of the **Self**, merely a construct of the mind.

IV. I am the only mind that possesses an objective consciousness. Other people I experience are projections that do not possess consciousness, but rather mimic the behavior that would lead to an assumption that they do.

The Unified Theory of Epistemological Solipsism is supported by both historical and revised conclusions drawn from René Descartes' "Cogito, ergo sum" and his evil demon theory, Plato's Allegory of the Cave, quantum physics, Max Planck's philosophical views, and my own ideas outlined within this paper.

"Many theories attempting to explain the nature of reality reach far beyond what's necessary. The simulation theory, for example, is essentially epistemological solipsism with extra steps. Why add so many extra pieces when the heart of the connection between these similar theories stares you right in the face? Reality, in its most bare-bones truth, is exactly what the Unified Theory of Epistemological Solipsism outlines." — *Damian Flowers*